

# PILGRIM NUCLEAR PLANT

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## Pilgrim's Rating Lowered by NRC

Boston Edison's Pilgrim nuclear power plant took a dive in the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's annual safety rating this year.

Due to numerous mistakes made by Pilgrim nuclear power plant workers including shipping radioactive materials to a laundry - the Plymouth reactor's safety ratings were downgraded for the first time in 8 years.

In a report released last week, the NRC found that workers had slipped in their handling of radioactive materials, while managers didn't do enough to protect workers from radiation. The report is released as Boston Edison announces cutting the Pilgrim workforce by one-third.

The NRC found a pattern of mistakes including accidentally sending a mildly radioactive material to a laundry in Springfield and to a battery recycling plant in Woburn. In addition, workers at the plant were exposed to unusually high levels of radioactivity in 1995 while an industry trend is toward reduced worker exposure levels.

While still better than those released in the late 80's, the lowered ratings brought charges from critics that deep reductions in staff are increasing the risk to the public.

Citing reductions in staff at the plant since 1994 from 950 to 680 with plans to go to 600, Duxbury's Mary Ott, of Citizens Urging Responsible Energy (CURE) said, "We've been seeing this backsliding for some time. The NRC should be poised for some enforcement action."

The Systematic Assessment of Licensee Performance, which is the NRC's report card for nuclear plants, found that Boston Edison still has "a strong management safety perspective" but warned that "overall performance at the Pilgrim station declined."

Pilgrim officials expressed disappointment in the rating saying they were particularly concerned about the drop in 2 categories from "superior" to "good".

Saying Edison could not be satisfied with "good" performance senior vice president E. Thomas Boulette promised to do whatever it takes to receive "superior" ratings in all areas.

Massachusetts power plants will begin competing directly for customers in January 1998.

The NRC had steadily improved its opinion of the Pilgrim plant following a 32-month shutdown for repairs that ended in 1988. The NRC said Pilgrim's safety rating improved to place it as one of the 2 best run nuclear plants in New England by 1994 after it was regarded as one of the 5 worst-run plants in the nation in 1986.

In its report, the NRC in particular criticized Pilgrim for losing 7 monitoring devices last year that contained radioactive material. Six were finally found in the trash at the plant, while the 7th had been sent out with the plant's laundry.

Then, in March, 1996, workers shipped a bag of slightly radioactive lab waste to a battery recycling plant in Woburn.

The NRC said workers made many errors during shutdown for refueling and repairs in 1995, including wedging a control rod used to slow nuclear reactions against another piece of equipment. Due to mistakes, Pilgrim managers temporarily stopped repairs to pay more attention to detail.

Pilgrim spokesman David Tarantino said it was natural for the public to link to NRC safety rating with cost-cutting at Pilgrim admitting there have been "morale concerns" as the staff shrinks. He said Edison has been trying hard to improve the situation.

Ron Eaton, the NRC's Pilgrim project manager during the evaluation, said he believes Pilgrim can turn the problems around, noting that Edison spent \$500 million to solve festering problems in the 1980's. "I don't think they ever want to get in those boots again."